

P 081737Z JUN 09 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1211
INFO AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL BARCELONA
SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIBREVILLE 000270

SIPDIS

LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS
AFRICOM FOR J00, J01, J2, J5

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/08/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [GB](#) [SP](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT OMAR BONGO DEAD AT 1430 LOCAL

REF: A. GABON 00246
[1](#)B. GABON 00238

Classified By: Political Officer Christopher Gunning for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (U) Gabonese officials have confirmed that President Omar Bongo Ondimba passed away on June 8 at 1430 Gabonese time. The Government of Gabon has announced a 30-day period of mourning. There are no details on the funeral yet. The Gabonese military is on alert, the international airport is closed, and a 1900 curfew has been announced. End Summary.

End of an Era

[1](#)2. (U) Vice Premiere Georgette Koko announced on Gabonese television that President Omar Bongo Ondimba, Africa's longest current serving head-of-state, passed away at 1430 in a Barcelona hospital. She said that the president was alive earlier today when Prime Minister Jean Eyeghe Ndong made his statement denying French media reports of Bongo's death on June 7. She said that Bongo suffered cardiac arrest on June 8 at 1430 Gabon time. Gabon will begin a 30-day period of mourning.

Stable Security Situation

[1](#)3. (SBU) Police have modestly increased their presence at night since it was officially announced that President Bongo is in Spain for medical treatment. However, there has been no noticeable increase despite the announcement of Bongo's death.

[1](#)4. (U) The Ministry of Defense announced that the military and gendarmerie have been placed on alert and the land, air and sea borders of Gabon closed. The airport has been closed and a 1900 curfew was announced.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Many Gabonese stayed home or kept their children from school after the reports of the possibility of the president's death on June 7. PolOff noted a decreased amount of traffic on the normally busy Bord du Mer even before the announcement of Bongo's death. The traffic has picked-up noticeably after the announcement of the curfew.

[1](#)6. (C) Embassy will hold an EAC at 1930 and will review tripwires.

Conflicting Media Reports

¶17. (SBU) The first reports of President Omar Bongo's death came from the French weekly "Le Point." Le Point claimed that President Bongo passed away on June 7. The report was attributed to a "source in the French government." France 24, a popular cable television channel in Gabon, carried the story at 2200 on June 7. By June 8, other international media sources, including some in Spain, posted reports that President Bongo had died. Most media reports in the afternoon of June 8 said that President Bongo died in the early afternoon of the same day, contrary to the timing of the June 7 reports.

¶18. (SBU) In a television announcement on the morning of June 8, Gabonese Prime Minister Jean Eyenghe Ndong refuted claims that President Bongo had died, suggesting that the president is actually "alive and well," and that the prime minister was "surprised" at the reports of President Bongo's death. Prime Minister Ndong said that the Gabonese Government would send a letter of protest to the French embassy complaining about the "erroneous" reports of Bongo's death.

The Next Step

¶19. (U) According to the Gabonese constitution President of the Senate Rose Rogombo will act as President during a 45-day period in which she will organize an election. According to our calculations, this period will end on July 22, 2009. There has been no announcement concerning Madame Rogombo's swearing-in or formal assumption of the Presidency. The election will be the first for the Gabonese in which Omar Bongo Ondimba will not be a candidate. The behind-the-scenes jockeying for lead position as Bongo's successor now enters center stage.
REDDICK